

EDITOR'S NOTE: Sen. Cardin writes periodic columns for Maryland publications. The following column about the 110th Congress may be of interest to your readers. Please contact Susan Sullam at susan_sullam@cardin.senate.gov if you have any questions.

PRECED: Senator Cardin is a member of five committees: Foreign Relations, Judiciary, Environment and Public Works, Budget and Small Business. His web site is: cardin.senate.gov

CONGRESS SETS STAGE FOR FUTURE LEGISLATION

By Benjamin L. Cardin

The 110th Congress recently completed its two-year cycle, and history will view this Congress as having made progress in setting the stage and laying the groundwork for the future, particularly in the areas of energy security, global warming and the environment, and civil rights. During its final days, the 110th Congress also dealt with an economic crisis that will continue to be a challenge for the next Congress and new President.

As energy prices have skyrocketed, Americans have made energy security and protecting our environment key priorities. Escalating fuel costs have made it clear that we need to invest in renewable, alternative energy sources and commit our nation to an Apollo-like mission that will lead to energy security within 10 years. The 110th Congress showed its support for new energy sources by extending tax credits for clean, renewable energy.

I am a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and I am extremely encouraged by the growing support to take significant action to combat global warming. The **Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act** -- which I co-sponsored and that I am optimistic will be enacted in the next Congress -- calls for reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by two-thirds by 2050. This measure also includes my amendment, which would provide an unprecedented \$171 billion to support public transit nationwide.

In the area of education, this Congress enacted important legislation, including the **College Cost Reduction Act**, the largest increase in college aid since the GI Bill. We also enacted **The America COMPETES Act**, which will strengthen educational opportunities in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and foreign languages. The new 111th Congress will focus on reauthorizing the **No Child Left Behind Act**, which needs significant reforms.

As a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I am committed to ensuring protection against all forms of discrimination. I have co-sponsored the **Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act** to ensure that victims of pay discrimination -- most often women -- have a fair chance to seek justice. In addition, I also have co-sponsored the **Matthew Shepard Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act** of 2007, the **Civil Rights Act of 2008**, and the **Employment Non-Discrimination Act**, all of which reinstate or expand civil rights protections and hold accountable those who violate the law.

As the 2008 election nears, I am committed to ensuring that every vote is counted. To ensure integrity of our voting process, in 2007 I joined Senators Barack Obama (D-IL) and Charles Schumer (D-NY) in co-sponsoring the ***Prevention of Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation in Federal Elections Act***. This measure would criminalize deceptive campaign tactics that deliberately seek to marginalize and disenfranchise minority voters.

Finally, this Congress -- in its closing days -- was forced to deal with an economic crisis that threatened our future and left every American vulnerable. I am angry that we were faced with a financial mess that was brought on by an almost total disregard for oversight and regulation on Wall Street. While the 110th Congress enacted emergency legislation aimed at infusing capital into our credit markets, it's clear that our economy is in for a very difficult period. It will be the job of the next Congress to return discipline and accountability in our financial sector and to help those who have been caught up in the economic maelstrom through no fault of their own.

As the 110th Congress comes to a close, I look forward to the 111th Congress and working with my colleagues to ensure greater accountability on Wall Street, lessen our dependence on foreign energy, reduce global warming and ensure equal protection under the law for every American.

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